

Letters to the Editor

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Deaths from Firearms among Children and Adolescents in New Mexico

Thousands of children and adolescents die each year from preventable injuries. Recently, gunshot fatalities have been cited as a major source of morbidity

and mortality among children and adolescents.¹ Specifically, injury by firearms continues to claim the lives of children and adolescents in the United States at an alarming rate.

Here we report data on firearm mortality in children and adolescents from birth to 19 years of age in New Mexico. The study sample was drawn from 2339 mortality cases from the Albuquerque, NM, Office of the Medical Investigator. From these cases, 250 children in the age group examined composed a final study sample for the period 1986 through 1991. For the purpose of comparison with the US experience, firearm fatality data were collected from the *Source Book of Criminal Justice Statistics* and the uniform crime reports for the same age groups and study period.²⁻⁴ Firearm fatalities were defined as all deaths resulting from an injury sustained from any firearm (e.g., rifle, pistol, or shotgun).

Males in the 15–19-year-old age group were most affected, with fatality rates increasing by 68%. Hispanic males were most affected, representing 114 of

the 250 fatalities. Unlike the national data indicating that Blacks are most affected by firearm fatalities, Blacks constituted only 2% of the New Mexico population and accounted for 1.6% of the firearm fatalities.⁵ Suicides represented 54% of the firearm fatalities, and homicides represented 34.8%. Two thirds of these deaths occurred in residential dwellings. The 1991 New Mexico firearm fatality rate of 8.71/100 000 (95% confidence interval [CI] = 6.62, 12.00) for newborn through 19-year-olds was significantly different from the US firearm fatality rate of 3.6/100 000 (Table 1).

Our data confirm that Hispanic males 15 to 19 years of age are seriously affected by fatal gunshot wounds in New Mexico. It is important that further research be conducted in order to identify the impact of accessibility to firearms in the home on the rate of firearm fatality in children and adolescents. □

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TABLE 1—New Mexico and US Firearm Fatality Rates (per 100 000) for Children Newborn through 19 Years of Age

Year	New Mexico		United States ^a	
	Rate	95% CI	Rate	95% CI
1986	9.31	6.62, 12.00
1987	6.88	4.56, 9.19
1988	8.71	6.11, 11.31
1989	7.69	5.24, 10.14	2.60	2.48, 2.72
1990	9.31	6.62, 12.00	3.02	2.89, 3.13
1991	8.71	6.11, 11.31	3.60	3.46, 3.74

Note. The 1990 New Mexico and US population statistics for the age group 0–19 years were used as denominators for rate and confidence interval calculations. CI = confidence interval.

^aNo US firearm fatality data were available for 1986–1988.

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